

Park Street Block
west side of Park Street
between Spring and Gray Streets;
portion of east side of Spring
Street between Park and State
Streets; portion of west side
of Gray Street between Park
and State Streets
Portland
Cumberland County
Maine

HABS No. ME-118

HABS
ME,
3-PORT,
23-

PHOTOGRAPHS

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS
ME,
3-PORT,
23-

PARK STREET BLOCK

HABS No. ME-118

Location:

West side of Park Street between Spring and Gray Streets; portion of east side of Spring Street between Park and State Streets; portion of west side of Gray Street between Park and State Streets.

Significance:

The largest and most ambitious residential row of the period in Maine, this complex is an outstanding example of an early (1835) urban real estate project.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: Summer and Fall of 1835.
2. Architect: The architect of the buildings is not known, but a reference in the autobiography of John Neal gives a clue to the origin of the design. Neal, a Portland writer, merchant and lawyer, describes his connection with the Park Street Block as follows:

"Being about to build for myself, I prepared the plan for a block of eight houses, offering to sell the lots, 26 1/2 x 100 feet on our widest and most fashionable street, for \$300 a piece, which would be now worth five thousand at least, to any person who would build with me, according to that plan, so as to secure an outward uniformity, leaving each to build the interior as he liked. While purchasing the materials for cash, making my contracts and preparing for the work, some of those who had engaged to build with me, failed in business, during the crash of 1836; while others undertook to build for themselves on Park Street, according to my plan, four stories, including a comfortable basement, above ground; but substituting bricks for granite, or gneiss; and wooden cornices and gutters for copper, and shingles for galvanized iron or zinc, whereby they saved a few hundreds, and succeeded in producing a huge, unsafe, unsightly row of tall houses, which passed then, and still pass for a factory, with strangers, though the long descending front has lately been broken up, in two or three places, by projecting windows, and porticos, which have materially improved the architectural appearance of the row."

John Neal, Wandering Recollections of a Somewhat Busy Life, Boston: Robert Brothers, 1869, pp. 357-58.

3. Original and subsequent owners: The block was built by the Park Street Proprietary, which purchased the land from John C. Grey. On Oct. 3, 1835 they chose lots as follows (lots marked on map, Book 148, p. 391, in Cumberland County Records, numbered toward Spring Street):

Lot #1	F. Tinkham	\$100	
2	W. W. Woodbury	275	
3	Th. A. Alexander	300	
4	James B. Cahoon	925	
5	John Day	100	
6	E. E. Upham	70	
7	J. D. Bugbee	275	
8	Henry Ward	100	
9	A. Blake, Jr.	150	
10	Thomas L. Willis	375	
11	John L. Meserve	350	
12	Marshall French	225	
13	Martin Gore for D. B. Dorrance	375	
14	Wm Cutter by Henry Barbour	250	
15	George Owen	275	
16	William Goodenow	60	
17	Martin Gore	400	
18	Solomon Adams	125	
19	F. Tinkham	350	
20	Th. A. Alexander	350	(Book 148, p. 390)

A sample chain of title follows:

On June 9, 1837 the trustees for the Proprietary sold "agreeably to a vote of the proprietary" lot #8 on the plan to Caleb B. Hall for \$3000 (Book 155, p. 1). The trustees were James Cahoon, Martin Gore, Oliver B. Dorrance, and Marshall French.

Its further history:

Caleb Hall to Benjamin Willis, 1839
Benjamin Willis to Clarissa and Charlotte Willis (his daughters-in-law, of Maine and Illinois, respectively), 1849
Clarissa M. Willis to Esther Shepley, 1857
Sarah S. Spalding (Shepley's daughter) to Kate M. Foster, 1893
Foster to Addie W. Little, 1895
Little to Charles F. Libby, 1902
Alice B. Libby to Margaret H. Jewell, 1928.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Contractors for brick were William Dyer and Joshua Haskell. Carpenter was Simeon Rice.

5. Original plans and construction: An undated plat from the Portland Registry of Deeds (Book 148, Page 385) shows the original subdivision of the block.
6. Alterations and additions: Five or six dwellings joined for use as a hotel. Gray Street houses demolished in 1965.

B. Historical Context:

Constructed by the Park Street Proprietors in 1835, the block is similar to rows erected in Boston during the period. In the original deed there was a stipulation that the open land at the rear of the buildings remain undeveloped, except by permission of the Proprietors. (This open space was still intact when the buildings were surveyed in 1962.) The Park Street Proprietary failed in 1838, a victim of the Panic of 1837. After the failure of the company, the houses were sold to various individuals and have since been used for a number of purposes. When surveyed by HABS in 1962, the complex was intact, however, in 1965, the Gray Street houses were demolished.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: An excellent example of early urban real estate development, well preserved and documented.
2. Condition of fabric: Fair, with little modification of exterior.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: This block development consists of twenty four-story row houses, each three bays in width, with sandstone frontispieces and cast iron balconies at the second floor level.
2. Foundation: Granite ashlar foundation walls extend three to four feet above grade.
3. Walls: Red brick bearing wall laid in common bond.
4. Porches and stoops: Stone steps; wrought or cast iron railings and newels. One Gothic Revival wood porch, one Gothic Revival bracketed roof at a street entry.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Sandstone and granite doorways, flat pilasters, simple stepped and/or flat entablatures. Some doorways have side lights, generally one door per entrance. Some double entrances.

- b. Windows: 1/1, 2/2 DH windows first floor, large 6/9 DH windows second floor, 6/6 DH third floor, 3/3 fourth floor.
- 6. Roof: Gable roof, composition roofing, simple wood cornice, boxed eaves. Wood and metal gutters. Metal downspouts are set into recesses in exterior wall. Fire walls extend past roof lines. One house has an octagonal wood cupola.
- C. Description of Interior of typical house:
 - 1. Floor plans:
 - a. First floor: Entry, stair hall, dining room, kitchen, back stairway, and ell (summer kitchen, sheds, etc.)
 - b. Second floor: Stair hall, two parlors separated by sliding doors, back stair.
 - c. Third and fourth floors: Stair hall, chambers, backstairs.
 - 2. Stairway:
 - a. Main stair: "L"-shaped, molded rail, turned newels, two round balusters per tread.
 - b. Back stair: "U"-shaped, two landings, molded rail.
 - 3. Flooring: Wood boards and strips, miscellaneous modern coverings.
 - 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster, bold plaster cornices, plaster centerpieces in ceilings.
 - 5. Doors: Two and four panel wood doors.
 - 6. Trim: Molded chair rails; elaborate marble fireplace mantelpieces.
 - 7. Hardware: None of interest.
 - 8. Heating: Fireplaces in major rooms. Modern steam heat.
- D. Site:

Park Street Block is located on the south side of Park Street between Spring and Gray Streets. The project includes fourteen row houses on Park Street and two groups of three row houses each facing on Spring Street and on Gray Street, separated from the Park Street group of alleys leading to the open area at the rear of the complex.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Early Views: An 1885 photo of the Sherwood Hotel, which was located in the block, shows the street decked with flags and bunting for a GAR convention (Portland Evening Express, 23 October 1957. In Maine Historical Society.) Another photo, undated, shows "The Sherwood: A Quiet Family Hotel, with elevator, Portland, Maine" (at Maine Historical Society).

B. Bibliography:

1. Secondary and published sources:

Article by Nathan Gould published in the Portland Transcript, 15 June 1898; Historical American Buildings Survey, Maine Catalog, Maine State Museum, 1974.

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